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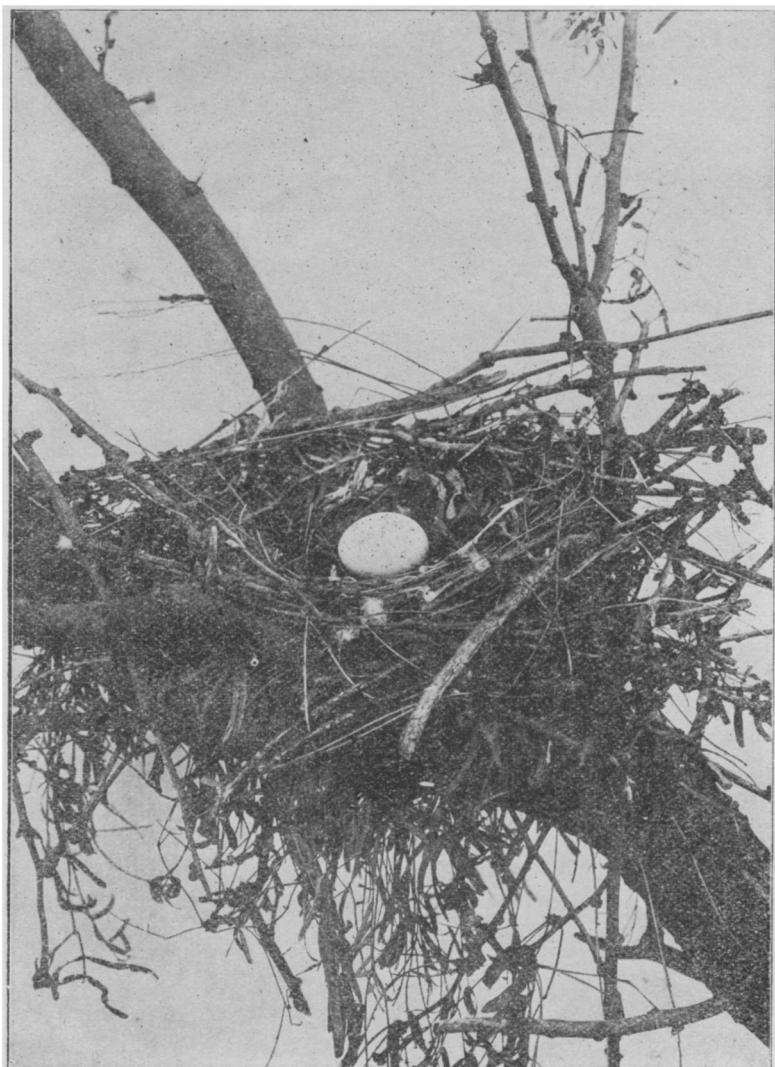


Photo by S. E. Robertson.

Mississippi Kite (*Ictinia mississippiensis*).

THE WILSON BULLETIN

NO. 65.

A QUARTERLY JOURNAL OF ORNITHOLOGY

VOL. XX

DECEMBER, 1908.

NO. 4

OLD SERIES VOL. XX. NEW SERIES VOL. XV.

NOTES ON THE NEST AND EGGS OF THE MISSISSIPPI KITE (*Ictinia mississippiensis*.)

BY DR. R. W. SHUFELDT.

It is interesting to note sometimes how in the case of common birds the descriptions left us by the older ornithologists as compared with the more modern writers on the subject vary in the matter of detail.

There is a good example of this to be found in the case of the Mississippi Kite, a bird known to naturalists in this country for many years.

Wilson left us no account either of the nest or the eggs of this species, though he promises both will be forth-coming in a future volume of his work. We find in T. M. Brewer's edition of Wilson's American Ornithology (1852), a *Synopsis of the Birds of North America*, where this Kite is listed as *Falco plumbeus* Gmel. (Subgenus *Ictinia*), and it is said of it that it "Nests in high trees. Eggs, three, light green, blotched with deep chocolate brown, globular." (p. 685.) By "globular" it is fair to presume that either Brewer or Audubon meant *round*, or else subglobular or nearly globular would have been stated.

In fact in his *Birds of America* the latter ornithologist does slightly modify this description when describing the eggs of this bird when he says that they number "two or three, almost globular, of a light greenish tint, blotched thickly over with deep chocolate brown and black."

Here we note two slight departures from the information he imparted to Brewer:

Ridgway in his *Manual of North American Birds* (p. 225), when referring to the nest and eggs of this Kite states: "Nest in tops of trees, usually near rivers. Eggs 2-3, 1.63 x 1.32, white usually sparsely and very faintly marked (adventitiously stained?) with pale brownish." The measurements given show that he did not consider the eggs to be globular in form, while, on the other hand, he was evidently in doubt as to whether these eggs were not entirely white, and such markings as occur upon them being adventitious. This description is entirely at variance with Audubon's, given above.

As late as 1884, Coues in his *Key to North American Birds*, apparently distrusted all former descriptions of the nest and eggs of the Mississippi Kite, and had never seen either himself, for he briefly states there: "Nest of sticks, etc., eggs?" In the fifth edition of the same work he enlarged upon this considerably for he there records: "Nest of sticks, etc., in trees, either deciduous or coniferous, at various heights, 20-60 feet; eggs 2-3, 1.65 x 1.35, pale glaucous, normally unmarked, but often with some faint spots or stains; laid in April, May, or June. (*Ictinia subcærulea*) (Bartr. Coues), 2nd-4th Ed. 1884-90. p. 524. p. 656.

This description is probably nearer the mark, though it is likely we would not have to wade very far again into the literature of the subject to meet with others essentially quite different.

Mr. S. Emmet Robertson formerly of Dallas, Texas, now of New York City, has presented me with an unusually fine photograph of the nest and an egg of the species here being considered taken by himself and he has kindly permitted its use in the present connection.